

# AMERICAS & THE CARIBBEAN



## ARGENTINA

In 1998, a workshop-seminar on The Role of Social Communications in the Media: Their role in the Disaster Situations, was held in August. It was sponsored by the Alumni Centre of the school of National Defence.

World Disaster Reduction Day joined up with Inter-American Water to form a Water Week from 3 - 10 October. 40 organisations sponsored dozens of events and activities, including the distribution of leaflets to 20,000 households, touching some 200,000 people. The campaign covered a period of four months.

Two workshops were organised and a seminar held on Risk Reduction. From these events the following suggestions were made to improve planning of the Day in future years:

- include the Day in school agendas
- reproduce posters locally
- maintain a website
- encourage earlier availability of resource material for longer exposure
- disseminate calendar of activities

## BOLIVIA

The UNDP Resident Coordinator hosted a breakfast and a workshop on natural disaster prevention for 50 senior policy and decision-makers. Key contacts were established between relevant ministries and NGOs during the breakfast to improve coordination in the event of a catastrophe. A Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) video was shown on the 1993 floods in Bolivia's Beni region, caused by El Niño.

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## BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

In 1997 the Montserrat volcano forced many people to leave their island and some of them sought shelter in the British Virgin Islands. The BVI community raised funds to assist them. From 6 - 10 October, radio programmes publicised the Day. A radio quiz on station ZBVI, and a panel discussion on ZBVI's Speak Out were broadcast.

A supplement was printed in both BVI newspapers. A Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning Training Course was organised by the BVI Office of Disaster Preparedness in conjunction with the Ministry of Education.


The 3-day course was held between 7-10 October 1998 and was attended by the 15 teachers from around the Territory. Recommendations of participants were:

- That the establishment of contingency planning in schools cannot only be the responsibility of teachers.

Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning Training Course	
Organised by the BVI Office of Disaster Preparedness.	
As part of the ODP's earthquake awareness campaign, a Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning Course was organised in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. The main objective of the course was to expose school personnel to general knowledge on natural hazards (earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis as well as fire and gas leaks) and their impacts and to the basic principles of disaster management and preparedness. Another main objective of the course was to train school personnel and give them the basic theoretical and practical knowledge and experience to face natural hazards and protect themselves and their school facilities, students and informants.	
The three-day course was conducted by Mr. Arturo Lopez-Panillo of Mexico from 7 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> October 1998. The participants consisted of about 15 teachers from schools around the Territory.	
The course also aimed to train the participants in multi-hazard contingency planning as they would:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Have adequate tools for contingency planning against the above mentioned hazards, thus protecting the school students, teachers, administrative personnel as well as information</li> <li>✓ understand the genesis and impacts of the main hazards that threaten schools and their personnel.</li> <li>✓ Design and execute contingency procedures against those hazards and</li> <li>✓ Know and promote amongst students, their families and their communities the main protective actions they should undertake in the case of the threat or presence of those hazards.</li> </ul>	<p><b>MANUAL resources:</b> It can be said that all the participants are ready to implement contingency planning activities within the school, as they have the general knowledge about hazards, vulnerability and prevention. The participants also have the experience of having worked with a hypothetical school and they can now apply the knowledge gained in their own schools.</p> <p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p>I. The establishment of contingency planning organisations in schools and the implementation of contingency planning procedures cannot be the responsibility of only teachers. They need the support of the principals, school owners and the Ministry of Education under the supervision of ODP. A regulation must be issued by the Ministry of Education jointly with ODP stating that all the schools within the Territory must have a contingency planning organisation and adopt and execute contingency planning procedures.</p> <p>II. The regulations must include the ideal contingency planning organisation schools must adopt and the contingency planning procedures they must undertake at time of an emergency. They must be the same for all schools.</p> <p>III. ODP has to review and finally decide on the typical organisation, contingency planning procedures and other activities schools must adopt and execute periodically and in the case of an emergency.</p> <p>IV. More Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning Training Courses have to be delivered in order to train personnel from the Ministry of Education, school principals and teachers. This can be done by ODP or by a consultant.</p> <p>V. Other training activities have to be implemented once the previous training courses have been delivered. The central (one of the subgroups) and first aids. These training courses can be simple and perhaps 3 or 4 hours in length at the most.</p> <p>VI. Activities performed by school contingency planning organisations have to be supervised and evaluated by ODP regularly especially evaluation courses.</p> <p>VII. A nationwide programme must be designed and developed for the implementation of contingency planning organisations within all schools in the BVI.</p> <p>VIII. This programme can be extended to other facilities (Marinas, wharves, electric power company, water supply company, libraries, and all the governmental buildings to ensure they are not (or will) be the least.</p>
<p><b>TRAINERS' GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING COURSE.</b></p> <p><b>Organization, facilities and equipment:</b> The training course was very well organised by the Office of Disaster Preparedness.</p> <p><b>Participants:</b> Although the training course was initially planned for 30 participants, only 15 attended, nevertheless, it did not affect the development of the training course as the majority of students a more active participation of the attendees.</p> <p>The group was a homogeneous one and a very active one. They all asked questions and gave opinions and shared experiences. It must be stated that the group was an excellent one. They all solved the exercises carefully, they all were very creative and imaginative. They were very enthusiastic and always in a good mood all along the training course.</p> <p><b>TRAINING COURSE OUTCOME</b></p>	
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- More Multi-Hazard Contingency and other Training Courses must be planned.
- A nation-wide programme must be developed for the implementation of contingency planning.

**IDNDR DAY 1998 - 14 OCTOBER 1998**  
 Message from the Chairman of the NEAC  
 "Prevention Begins with Information"



**IDNDR DAY 1998 - 14 October, 1998**  
**Message From the Chairman of the NEAC**

**"Prevention begins with information"**

This is more than a truism: it has proven to work here in the Virgin Islands over the past 10 years. It can be readily argued that the lion's share of the resources used up in our disaster preparedness programme over that period has gone into providing information to the people of these islands. To school children and their teachers, to community groups, to government officials and politicians and to the public at large. In this endeavour, we have used all of the media available: the printed and spoken word, newsletters, magazines, special booklets for schools, videos, broadcasts, and radio programmes. We do realize today that an informed community is a community more able to practice prevention and reduction of disaster.

But this is a continuing struggle. New persons come on the scene all the time. We forget. So the delivery of information has to be continual. New and creative ways must always be sought to get across the messages that will help to build a culture of prevention. Because of that information stream, and the experience of past events, we are beginning to see changes in the thinking and behaviour of individuals and groups. This is the cultural change which we seek.

Disaster reduction is based on strong commitment and participation by all components of the society at risk. The private media, print and electronic, have demonstrated their understanding of the importance of their role in transmitting disaster information. I am sure that this public service role will continue. Through the Public Education Sub-Committee of the NEAC, chaired by the Chief Information Officer, the media houses bring to bear their views on disaster preparedness and management.

The Government Department of Information and Public Relations co-ordinates the entire effort and provides leadership in the vital area. The community owes a debt of gratitude to them all.

*Produced by the Office of Disaster Preparedness*  
 "It is better to Prepare and Prevent natural disasters before they happen" - Voltaire 1764

participated in the awards ceremony, when special certificates were presented to students.

On 14 October, the Canadian National Committee-International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (CNC-IDNDR) marked the 1998 World Disaster Reduction campaign with a breakfast meeting of Members of Parliament, media and key individuals in the emergency preparedness community.

Over 50 people attended the breakfast, which was held at the National Press Club in Ottawa on the 1998 Campaign theme. The aim was two-fold: to focus on efforts to create a national programme and supporting strategy to reduce the devastating effects of natural disasters in Canada and to encourage the media as working partners in promoting natural disaster prevention measures.

**Speakers at the event were:**

- Jean-Pierre Wallot, President Royal Society of Canada (Welcoming remarks)
- Alain Davenport, chair, CNC-IDNDR, and representing the Canadian Academy of Engineering (CNC Initiatives beyond the Decade)
- André Tremblay, Acting executive Director, Emergency Preparedness Canada (the need for a Natural Disaster Mitigation Programme for Canada)
- John Stone, Director General, Policy, Programme and International Affairs, Atmospheric Environment Service, Environment Canada (Global Change and Natural Disaster Mitigation)
- Richard Haworth, Director General, Sedimentary and Marine Geo-science Branch, Geological Survey of Canada, Natural Resources Canada (The impact of climate change)

**CANADA**

In 1998, a special World Disaster Reduction Day event was convened by the IDNDR National Committee for Canada and discussions were held with groups that included participation by teachers, psychologists, and natural disaster experts. They met in a school located in an area of western Canada that had suffered from floods. The Director of the IDNDR Secretariat, Mr. Philippe Boullé,

**Long-term weather forecast: havoc**  
 Ice Storm '98, among history's costliest natural disasters per capita, just tip of the iceberg

*By [unreadable] and [unreadable]*

The ice storm that struck the eastern United States and southern Canada in January 1998 was not just a weather event, it was a disaster. It caused billions of dollars in damage, left millions of people without power and water, and resulted in the deaths of at least 100 people. The storm was part of a larger trend of extreme weather events that have become more frequent and severe in recent years. Scientists are warning that these events are likely to become even more common as the climate continues to warm.

The ice storm was the result of a rare weather phenomenon called a "rain ice" storm. It occurred when a cold front from the north met a warm front from the south, creating a layer of ice that fell from the sky. The ice was up to an inch thick and caused widespread power outages and transportation problems. The storm was particularly devastating in the Northeast and Midwest, where it caused billions of dollars in damage and left millions of people without power and water.

The ice storm was just one of many extreme weather events that have occurred in recent years. In 1997, a major drought hit the United States, causing billions of dollars in damage and the deaths of thousands of people. In 1998, a major hurricane hit the Gulf of Mexico, causing billions of dollars in damage and the deaths of thousands of people. In 1999, a major earthquake hit the West Coast of the United States, causing billions of dollars in damage and the deaths of thousands of people.

Scientists are warning that these events are likely to become even more common as the climate continues to warm. They are calling for action to be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to prepare for the impacts of climate change.

# Storms: National conference on disasters set for December

Continued from page A1

That raises the potential for damage in the event of a weather-related disaster, a Economic prosperity. With the population generally wealthier than it has been in the past, "we've got more things to be damaged," said Mr. Kovacs. He noted that the government's reaction to disasters at all levels means that there has been little re-evaluation in change such as sewer systems. As a result, many systems are deteriorating and inadequate to meet special demands. "There is no notion that the weather is changing, and that some aspects of that change are leading to more severe weather than we've ever seen," said Mr. Kovacs.

Historically, weather-related claims have accounted for only about two per cent of all insurance claims, said Mr. Kovacs. That figure has now risen to 10 per cent. Mr. Kovacs said weather-related claims "are not big enough yet that we're not so serious about it as the cost of insurance" but warned that that could change if costs continue to rise. The insurance industry is worried enough that it established the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction earlier this year. Its mission is to explore ways to reduce the loss of life and property caused by severe weather and earthquakes.

In co-operation with Emergency Preparedness Canada, the Institute has spent the last few months holding workshops across the country with representatives of government, the private sector, non-profit groups, and academics to develop a framework to mitigate natural disaster risks. "In this country," said Mr. Kovacs. "While there is no agreement on what to do, there has been broad consensus among workshop participants that investments are needed to mitigate the damage caused by natural disasters when they occur." Mr. Kovacs said these investments can be very cost effective. "A 100-year investment initially can lead to major savings down the road."

- Paul Kovacs, Executive Director, Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, Insurance Bureau of Canada (Acting before the disaster)
- Kathryn White, President, Black and White Communications Inc. (Building Partnerships, Youth, Media, and Industry)

select group of specialists in news management, journalism, NGOs, and industry to discuss the role of the media in natural disaster. The group examined lessons learned, case studies and best practices from recent research.

Participants underlined the increasing severity of natural disasters and the changes in the weather: higher heat in summer, colder days in winter and more violent winter storms and their impact on the sea level, the permafrost, ground water and of course on agriculture and infrastructure.

## COLUMBIA

A 15-second public awareness announcement concerning water was broadcast at various times of the day over national television from October to December 1997. A video entitled "Let's Prevent Floods" was sent to 32 regional disaster prevention and education committees for broadcast in all municipalities. 10,000 educational flyers, "Calltarin el Arroyo Feliz y Mi Amiga el Agua", were printed and distributed to the regional committees for local distribution to institutions, community and educational authorities.

"La prevencion es una Responsabilidad de Todos" of the municipality of Medellin organized a seminar on 11 October 1998 on the Prevention of Natural Disasters with 4 main themes:

- The seismic risks in cities and seismic micro-zoning projects,
- Communications resources for the prevention of disasters,
- Social networks in prevention of disasters,
- Intervention in the case of emergencies.

Following the breakfast meeting, CNC-IDNDR member Kathryn White and her Risk & Society Project hosted a roundtable on The Media and Public Trust. This Roundtable brought together a

**Roundtable:**  
*the Media and Public Trust*

**RISK & Society**  
**RISQUES & Société**

A Un  
Schéma  
Project  
Projet  
Résumé

**Participants**

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**Patrick Cyr**  
Programming Manager, Rogers Cable, Ottawa

**Christopher Derrin**  
Director, School of Journalism, Carleton University

**Lynne Haddrell**  
Editor, Kingston Whig-Standard

**Scott Haggart**  
Executive Producer, News, CTV-TV, Ottawa

**Phil Jenkins**  
Location Manager, CBC-TV, Ottawa

**Emmanuelle La Traversie**  
Anchor, CTV-TV, Hull

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Senior Vice President Operations, Bellcore, The Weather Network

**John Mulholland**  
National Director, Field Operations, Red Cross

**Don Butler**  
Executive Editor, The Ottawa Citizen

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Anchor, NewsWatch, CBC-TV, Montreal

**Michel Vézette**  
News Director, CKAC-Radio, Montreal

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## COSTA RICA

In 1998, 14 NGOs and government institutions conducted an all-day fair in San Jose's Central Park. Primary and secondary schools watched demonstrations on disaster preparedness and all the events were well covered by the media

Civil protection professionals chose a school in San Jose as a site for a publicised emergency


drill. The Ministry of Public Education has included emergency evacuation drills in public school curricula since 1991.

The National Emergency Commission organised:


- A National Seminar on Journalism and Disasters
- A workshop in the Nicoya Peninsula on Information and Vulnerability.
- A national information campaign.

A weekly programme will now be broadcast on National Radio and Channel 13 will broadcast spots about disasters prevention and response.

**For more information contact:**  
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**United Nations**  
 Department of  
 Humanitarian Affairs



**IDNDR**  
 1990-2000  
 Building a Culture of Prevention

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### Communities Manage Early Warning Flood System in Costa Rica, Saving Lives

**A** combination of early warning for floods in summer 1996 and July 1997 shows how good information and a plan for local involvement makes the difference when early warning is acted upon - saving lives and property in 1997 - or a major loss of property and loss of life in 1996.

In 1996, a heavy rain in the middle of the rainy season caused a major flood in Costa Rica. The water was rising fast and many people were in danger. The government had a plan for early warning, but it was not working well. Many people were not aware of the danger and did not know what to do. As a result, many people lost their lives and property.

In 1997, the government had learned from the 1996 experience. They had a better plan for early warning. They had more people involved in the plan. They had more people aware of the danger. They had more people who knew what to do. As a result, many lives were saved and property was protected.

**Communities manage early warning flood system in Costa Rica, saving lives**

The 1996 flood in Costa Rica was a major disaster. It caused the death of many people and the loss of a lot of property. The government had a plan for early warning, but it was not working well. Many people were not aware of the danger and did not know what to do. As a result, many people lost their lives and property.

In 1997, the government had learned from the 1996 experience. They had a better plan for early warning. They had more people involved in the plan. They had more people aware of the danger. They had more people who knew what to do. As a result, many lives were saved and property was protected.

**Costa Rica's Disaster Profile, with a Focus on Floods**

Costa Rica, with a population of 3.4 million and a territory of 52 000 km<sup>2</sup>, is a country of diverse geographical features. The country's geographical location, topography and the history of its socio-economic development all combine to make Costa Rica highly vulnerable to floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and other hazards.

From a meteorological point of view, the hurricane season and the country's location in the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone bring a range of risks to different areas of the country. Topographically, the extreme variations in altitude between the mountains and the plains, as well as the great abundance of rivers, cause frequent flood-related emergencies, aggravated by the effects of deforestation and pollution on river banks.

In 1996, the country was affected by several hydro-meteorological events that caused millions of dollars in losses in large areas of the national territory. The government, already struggling in cope with a serious budget deficit, was forced to come up with considerable additional resources to provide the services, rehabilitation and reconstruction required after each emergency.

In 1997, the El Niño phenomenon, in conjunction with the normal seasonal rains in the region, gave rise to several floods, mainly in the Atlantic coast.

For more information, please contact: International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Palais de Nations, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland, Tel: (41) 22 796 61 94, Fax: (41) 22 711 34 94. E-mail: idn@hahk.uno.org

## CUBA

Architecture students attended lectures on disaster management, hazards, vulnerability and disaster reduction planning. The first National Workshop for Disaster Reduction Engineering and Architecture was scheduled for October 1998.

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## ECUADOR

A seminar was organised by the IDNDR Secretariat, Ecuador's National Civil Defence Directorate and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) between 29 September and 1 October 1998 in Quito